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WILDLIFE SERVICES—Rhode Island

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USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in Rhode Island

Every day, residents, industries, organizations, and agencies call on the Wildlife Services (WS) Rhode Island program for expertise in protecting agriculture, property, natural resources, and human health and safety from damage or threats posed by wildlife. Managed by professional wildlife biologists, WS responds with effective, selective, and humane strategies to resolve wildlife conflicts.

Rhode Island is a diverse ecological mix of urban, suburban, and rural settings with approximately one million residents.



Top 5 Major Assistance Activities:

- Protecting civilian and military aircraft and passengers from wildlife collisions
- Evaluating and monitoring the threat of West Nile virus to Rhode citizens
- Protecting property, agriculture, and vegetable crops from Canada
- Protecting buildings from damage by gulls, crows, pigeons, woodpeckers, bats, and squirrels
- Protecting utilities from power outages caused by ospreys

Top 5 WS Research Projects of Interest to Connecticut:

- Defining and reducing wildlife hazards to aviation
- Evaluating waterfowl as disease, parasite, and noxious weed reservoirs
- Managing wildlife vectors of rabies and other wildlife or zoonotic diseases
- Improving assessment, sampling, and economic methods for wildlife damage management
- Reducing goose damage through improved methods of harassment and direct management

The ecological and geographic diversity of the State provides for a remarkably varied and growing wildlife population, which also increases the likelihood of conflicts with the public. WS provides integrated wildlife management programs that are biologically, environmentally, and socially sound and comply with local, State, and Federal wildlife management regulations.

WS provides agricultural assistance primarily to vegetable and turf farmers experiencing damage by Canada geese. WS also assists the public when buildings are damaged or water supplies are contaminated by gulls, pigeons, crows, or bats. WS protects the traveling public by reducing hazards caused by crows, geese, ospreys or other wildlife, on or near an airport. The WS Rhode Island program also provides assistance as needed to resolve a variety of other wildlife damage or conflict situations.

Applying Science & Expertise to Wildlife Challenges

WS offers information, advice, equipment, and materials that enable many people to resolve wildlife conflicts on their own. Often, this *technical assistance* can be provided over the phone. WS may also provide cooperative on-site help, or *direct assistance*, to address complex wildlife problems that may be difficult or cannot be safely and effectively resolved by others. To support this effort, WS conducts *scientific research* across the Nation to develop answers to new problems posed by wildlife and to ensure the program benefits from the latest science and technology.

Protecting Air Travel—Wildlife strikes with airplanes cost U.S. civil aviation more than \$550 million annually and creates hazards to flight crews, passengers, and aircraft. Many Rhode Island airports are expanding as air travel is expected to

increase to and from the State. Unfortunately, as wildlife populations such as geese, coyotes, and deer increase around these airports, the risk to air travelers grows as well.

WS is recognized internationally for its scientific expertise in reducing wildlife hazards to the aviation industry. WS' National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC) conducts research to understand the nature of wildlife hazards at airports, develops management tools to reduce these hazards, and provides airport personnel with information to manage hazards. The manual for "Managing Wildlife Hazards at Airports", coauthored between WS research personnel and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), continues to be an important information resource for certificated airports throughout the United States.

WS personnel present training, conduct wildlife hazard assessments, and direct wildlife management projects at Rhode Island airports through partnerships with the FAA, airport management, State and Federal agencies, and others. In FY06 WS Rhode Island personnel provided direct assistance to one joint military-and-civilian airport and one civilian airport, as well as technical assistance to both airports. In addition, WS provides at least two Wildlife Hazard Management workshops for airport personnel each year, depending on request, which greatly improves coordination and communication among airports, WS, and the FAA regarding wildlife hazards.

Wildlife Disease Management and Protecting Human and Livestock Health—As human and wildlife populations grow, the threat of wildlife-borne diseases being passed to humans and livestock increases. To enhance preparedness for emergency disease response, the WS program continues to collaborate with USDA Veterinary Services (VS) and several state and local health agencies.

Avian influenza (AI)—the bird flu is a disease caused by a virus that infects domestic poultry, wild birds (geese, ducks and shorebirds). Each year, there is a bird flu season just as there is for humans and, as with people, some forms of the flu are worse than others.

The highly pathogenic H5N1 strain of bird flu has been found in an increasing number of countries in Europe, Asia and Africa. Currently, H5N1 avian influenza is not present in the United States. Though it is possible the highly pathogenic H5N1 strain may spread to this country, the U.S. Government is taking steps to prepare for and minimize the potential impact of this disease. During FY06, the U.S. Department of the Interior and U.S. Department of Agriculture initiated an enhanced proactive interagency program to monitor wild migratory birds in the United States and to test statistically significant samples of populations of various migratory bird species for avian influenza. As part of this program, the WS Rhode Island program is working collaboratively with the State and other public and private organizations to conduct surveillance activities for avian influenza in wild migratory birds.

Protecting Personal Property—The Canada goose population has been increasing in Rhode Island during the past 30 years and continues to be a major wildlife problem. During FY06 approximately 60% of public requests for assistance in Rhode Island involved conflicts caused by Canada geese and gulls. While goose populations continue to grow, recently some traditional management methods often have become limited in effectiveness. WS' NWRC is working to develop more socially acceptable and effective management methods. WS in Rhode Island recommends an integrated wildlife damage management program in which several methods are used in combination to manage goose damage. Examples include habitat management, exclusion, harassment, and repellants. WS program specialists currently conduct integrated programs with towns and homeowner associations to prevent goose eggs from hatching, significantly slowing goose population growth.

Gulls represent another wildlife species that causes serious property damage or other conflicts in Rhode Island. In FY06, WS conducted 20 consultations and evaluations involving gulls, many of which also involved assistance in providing recommendations on the issuance of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) depredation permits.

Assistance with providing recommendations to the FWS was done at no charge to the cooperators or FWS.

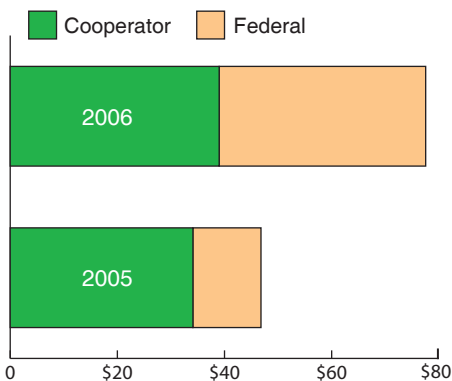
Looking to the Future

Preventing wildlife-borne diseases from affecting humans and livestock has also become a growing concern in Rhode Island. Increased air travel through Rhode Island airports, coupled with the population growth of many bird species, has created a greater need for airport managers to deal with safety threats posed by wildlife.

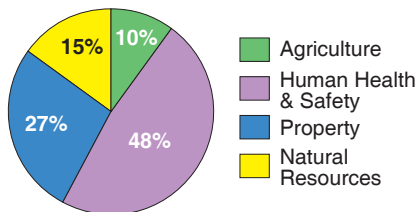
Rhode Island Wildlife Services Funding

In addition to receiving federally allocated funds, WS also receives money from cooperators who have a vested interest in the programs: producers, private individuals, businesses, and other Federal, State, and local government agencies. In most cases, cooperators need help to resolve wildlife damage problems or actually have a key role in wildlife damage management.

Total Funding (Thousands)



Resources Protected % of Total Funds



USDA is an equal employment provider and employer.